

BUILDING EFFECTIVE TEAMS

Study Notes

Building Effective Teams

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LESSON 1: LEADING WITH EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

KEY COMPONENTS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

What is emotional intelligence?

Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to be aware of, and manage, your own emotions, as well as the emotions of others. To have emotional intelligence means being able to choose how to feel. This ability benefits not just you, but also the people around you, and enables you to maintain and enhance your working relationships.

Emotional intelligence in action

A newly appointed Training Officer was stopped in the corridor just an hour after starting work on his first day. The person who stopped him asked him sternly, “Are you the new Training Officer?”

“Yes, how do you—” he said, as he extended his hand. The hand was refused and his greeting interrupted.

“I put in an expenses claim and your people haven’t paid me yet! Where’s my money?!!!”

Shocked by this rudeness, the Training Officer responded, “Well, I’ve no idea, I’m not here an hour yet. But I’ll certainly look into it for you. Would you be kind enough to introduce yourself?”

This was emotional intelligence in action. Although he was initially shocked, the Training Officer recovered quickly, realizing this was not a personal attack. This person knew nothing about him, and for all he knew, he might behave like this with everyone. So he chose not to rise to it.

Components of emotional intelligence

The three key components of leading with emotional intelligence are:

- Self-awareness and self-management
- Awareness of others, and
- Rapport building

Leaders should practice, and aim to master, each of these core components.

Self-awareness and self-management

In order to improve your ability to choose your reactions, responses, and feelings, you first need to become aware of how thoughts and feelings are interconnected. We give our feelings names like fear, anger, happiness, tiredness, anticipation, and so on. Whenever you notice any feeling, there is always a thought or a set of thoughts that either create it or hold it in place. If you have the presence

of mind to notice your thoughts and let them go, the associated feeling will go too. If you are able to choose a different type of thought, the new one will bring with it a feeling to match.

Practical ways to learn this include a way of sitting quietly paying attention to thoughts entering the mind, letting each one go, and noticing what thought turns up next. Giving your attention and energy to more positive thoughts automatically gives rise to more positive feelings. Practice makes this possible.

Awareness of others

Observing other people as they interact with one another will help you to understand how we interact at an unconscious level. Pay particular attention when you see people interacting in a way that makes them look or sound alike. They may mirror one another's posture, tilt their heads to keep their eyes in line, rest their head or chin on one hand, or cross arms and legs in the same direction. Listen out for similarities in the pitch of their voices, voice tones, volume, or emphasis. Notice also how they seem to affect one another's mood or state. It is not necessary to notice everything, just allow yourself to pick up on whatever stands out easily for you at first. Confine your study to a few minutes here and there and be subtle - otherwise people may wonder why you keep staring at them! What will become evident over time is how sensitively - and automatically - we respond to one another in mood or appearance and how readily people entrain (or synchronize) with one another.

Rapport building

Being able to influence people interpersonally, that is, not through reward or punishment, but through how you interact with them, means being capable of joining them in the state or mindset they are in, and then leading them to one that is preferable. The skills of connecting by building rapport are what makes the similarities I just mentioned work. Rapport, which is a connection with the unconscious attention of another person, is the foundation to this joining effect. Knowing that you can lead in this way is a key aspect of non-verbal influence and the application of emotional intelligence.

Because you will have observed people adjusting to one another automatically, you may be able to recognize that, if you just spend a second or two consciously aligning yourself with people you speak to, automatic pilot quickly takes over, and then you can stop thinking about alignment issues and simply focus on the discussion. To practice this type of rapport building, at any moment in a conversation, pay attention to the centerline of the other person's upper body, the angle of their shoulders, and how their eyes line up with yours. Being subtle, roughly align your body into an approximate mirror image of theirs, and straight away forget about it. That way, you can keep your attention on the conversation and just subtly notice from time to time how well you stay aligned. This is a key element in improving your ability to connect with other people, manage your relationship with them, and ultimately to influence them.

Components in action

Let's look at an example of these skills being applied to solve an ongoing issue at a food manufacturing unit:

A buyer from the national chain stores was always rude and bad tempered when she did an inspection visit to the factory. She would often reject pallet-loads of product saying they were not good enough, and then walk off. The team would spend days afterwards trying to perfect the presentation of the product, and out of fear of losing the contract, no-one had the courage to challenge her.

On one occasion, she had just rejected three pallet-loads of a brand new product about to be delivered into the shops, and the panic was palpable. In that moment, the engineering team leader spoke up. “Before you go, could I ask you a question?” The fury in the buyer’s gaze could have melted ice cubes. He remained calm and respectful.

“I know you’re incredibly busy and I don’t want to hold you up, but if we could make it easier for you would that be helpful?”

“Only if it saves me time!” she retorted looking at her watch.

“Could I ask you what specifically makes you say these are unsuitable?”

She jerked out a finger pointing to wrinkles on the end wrapping of packs of biscuits.

“Ah, it would take us just three minutes to run a sample to correct it,” said the team leader. “If that works, would you accept it?” It worked, and she did.

A precedent had been set and it saved a considerable amount of time and money for the company from then on.

BENEFITS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Being emotionally intelligent can be very beneficial to everybody in an organization, but it is particularly important for leaders to master this skill.

Being emotionally intelligent helps you to:

- Build and maintain good working relationships
- Recover from challenges and crises, and
- Make tough choices and decisions

Build and maintain good working relationships

Building good working relationships is important for your career. Co-operation and agreement are the glue that holds teams and organizations together; and emotional intelligence is an essential component in maintaining strong working relationships. Solid interpersonal skills and the ability to ‘read’ and build rapport with other people, are valuable characteristics of emotionally intelligent leaders.

Maintaining good working relationships can be challenging, given different working styles, expectations, and perspectives. Having the ability to weigh up challenging behaviors and be open to differences in perception allows for more flexibility of responses, and is aided by emotionally intelligent thinking.

Recover from challenges and crises

Even daily challenges like staff not turning up for work or not completing their tasks on time, can test leaders and managers to stay alert and find solutions. When bigger events happen like, for example, a key worker resigning, or losing an important customer, the ability to remain calm, clear-minded, and solution-focused is a key sign of effectiveness and a measure of emotional intelligence. Resilience, the ability to recover quickly or to remain resourceful during and following unexpected hurdles, grows as a result of developing and practicing emotional intelligence, and is a core skill for leaders.

Let's consider an example of a leader using emotionally intelligent thinking to manage a situation:

The Chief Executive of an organization was disappointed when he realized he would have to re-structure the organization. He had two options, and the option he had chosen would dismantle an effective way of running their service that he and his team had been very proud of for a long time. However, the decision he had made would also preserve more jobs and prolong the life of the service over the next few years. He described it as having made the 'right' decision with his head, but a painful and difficult one for his heart. He wanted his close colleagues to feel positive and supported in the new arrangements. To address this, he took an emotionally intelligent decision to seek some personal coaching to help him come to terms with the decision, so that his incongruence would not show and possibly unsettle his colleagues.

Make tough choices and decisions

Having to let go of prized ideas or ways of working, saying no to what seem like reasonable requests from team members and fielding their resentment, or even deciding among competing priorities are regular occurrences for leaders. High emotional intelligence can take the stress out of such situations where the leader can take them in their stride.

IMPROVING YOUR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

As a leader, there are techniques you can use to improve your emotional intelligence, such as:

- Recognizing the physical sensations behind your feelings
- Categorizing your thoughts, and
- Deepening your rapport with others

Recognizing the physical sensations behind your feelings

An essential part of learning how to recognize and gauge your own feelings is to **recognize the physical sensations behind your feelings** and develop a fine-tuned awareness of the physical sensations that arise when you feel angry, nervous, relaxed, on-edge, and so on.

Practice noticing where in your body you feel the different sensations behind what you are feeling, especially for those feelings that happen most often, and learn to work with them. Practicing this can give you the presence of mind to notice which thoughts are driving your reactions or feelings, and either choose to dismiss the thoughts immediately (and therefore the feeling), or to ask yourself, "Do I want to feel like this right now?" and decide to go with it and permit the reaction if it seems appropriate.

To practice this, think of a situation that would provoke a negative reaction in you, or a situation that you wish to handle better. Call it to mind now and pay attention to where in your body you have those sensations. Keep them separate from the name you give the feeling. So if the feeling was anger, notice the heat in your face, the tightness in your jaw and neck muscles, your shallow breathing, and recognize that it is when your body does this, exactly the same way every time, this is what you have learned to call anger. This is an example description of anger sensations, and may not match your personal experience of feeling angry. Doing this with feelings that are common for you will help you to notice quickly when the feeling starts to arise, before it triggers your unwanted reaction. That tiny gap between stimulus and reaction can give you time to notice what you are thinking and to make a choice - allowing you to change your relationship to those feelings.

A lot of the physical sensations you notice will occur somewhere down the center-line of your torso. This is because the emotional part of your brain that coordinates these signals – the Limbic Brain and the Brain Stem beneath it – direct their messages up and down the center of your torso, through the autonomic nervous system, which connects through internal organs.

Categorizing your thoughts

This will help you to identify and release thoughts that come into your mind. This demands a little more attention to each thought, because you'll take time to classify it in some way. It could be a thought of something specific or you could call it an interesting thought, or an exciting one, a creative one, and so on. This practice will help you to quickly recognize the thoughts that connect to your unwanted feelings. If you spend time practicing this, you will also find that choosing a helpful alternative thought will come easier, and this can be a great advantage.

Just for a few seconds, sit quietly and allow stray thoughts to enter your consciousness. As you detect a thought, categorize it with a comment like, “that’s about a phone call; that’s about dinner tonight”; and so on. Keep doing that for a minute or so.

If you find yourself holding on to a thought, that’s just thinking and it’s normal. Just allow yourself a little smile, let it go, and bring your attention to the next thought. This will strengthen your ability to choose your responses to emotional events.

Deepening your rapport with others

Building rapport with other people makes your interactions with them easier and encourages the kind of conversations that build cooperation, willingness, and trust. You can **deepen rapport** with others by listening to them in a genuine way – paying close attention to how they look and sound, and reacting appropriately. You can demonstrate your interest in a conversation by asking ‘what?’ and ‘how?’ questions to help the person specify what they are talking about, or by paraphrasing to verify that you understand them correctly.

Questions based on what is vague about what they say can be very effective in deepening rapport as they allow you to ask for further explanation, showing you are interested in the topic being discussed. They also help the speaker think more clearly. Ask questions like “How exactly does that work?”, or, “When you say you have a problem, what specifically IS the problem?”, or, “You said you can’t, but what would happen if you could?” They also allow you to ask for clarification of the person’s opinions or thoughts with questions like “How do you feel about the situation?” or, “What would stop you from doing that?”

Emotional intelligence in action

A team was thrown into a panic when an internal audit of their unit was declared in the middle of the critical phase of a project. The team leader was unsuccessful in having the audit delayed until after the project ended, and held a meeting to help her stressed colleagues deal with the situation. She confessed that she was shocked at the bureaucratic attitude of the audit manager, and had felt the same panic they felt too. Then she had noticed that her feelings of fear were generated by thinking about everything that could go wrong.

She asked each team member what their feelings were in that moment, and pointed out that just like any project, outcomes were unpredictable. But nothing was happening yet. Everything was fine, it was only thinking that was doing the damage. Her calm attitude and clear thinking was contagious

and the team agreed a plan with the auditors for helping them with audit requests. The project finished on time and within budget, and their unit passed the internal audit. The team leader used emotional intelligence to resolve the situation by becoming aware of her own feelings and the thoughts behind them, and by taking time to understand the feelings of her team and address them.

NOTES

LESSON 2: COACHING AND MENTORING

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COACHING AND MENTORING

Coaching versus mentoring

Coaching and mentoring are powerful human interactions that are highly valued in the business world. Indeed, you might think that they are the same thing. Coaching and mentoring do use the same communication skill sets. However, they are undertaken by people with different qualifications who have different working relationships with their clients.

So to begin, what is coaching? It is generally viewed as being a short-term relationship with a set timeframe. It is structured and formal, and focuses on a specific set of agreed objectives.

Mentoring, on the other hand, is a longer-term process. It is based on mutual trust and respect. And unlike coaching, it is more focused on creating an informal supportive association between the mentor and mentee.

Let's consider coaching in a bit more detail. First, the focus is on personal development, personal behavior, and issues that arise at work. The coaching objectives are focused on achieving specific and immediate goals. A coaching relationship generally has a set duration. And it is usually short-term, and focused on areas and issues for specific development. The coaching involves a structured program of scheduled, regular meetings. And often, the coach does not have direct experience of the client's role or sector. The exception to this is when the coaching takes place in-house within an organization.

And what about mentoring? Well, with mentoring, the focus is on career, personal development, and networking. In fact, the mentee sets the agenda for the relationship. A mentoring relationship is ongoing and takes place over a long period of time. Rather than focusing on immediate goals, it concentrates on the person and their development. The setup is usually informal with meetings taking place on demand. The mentor is more experienced, and often older, and usually has better connections in their network.

If you are unsure of who does what, ask the following questions. Are you facilitating an expansion in the person's self-awareness? If the answer is yes, then you are in the role of coach. And are you transferring knowledge that I have some experience of? If the answer is yes, then you are in the role of mentor.

Behaviors and actions

The key focus for a coach is to enable the client to improve upon their performance and habits to form positive behaviors. They rarely give advice. The mentor, on the other hand, makes direct suggestions from their own personal knowledge and experience, and gives the mentee specific advice.

An effective coaching process relies on behavioral surveys, assessments, and 360 reviews. The results of these then inform the direction of the intervention as the coach uses them to focus on the areas of need. In contrast, mentoring does not rely on such systems and surveys. The focus in mentoring is on competencies and experiences gained over time.

Business and roles

A mentor is usually highly experienced and qualified in a specific area of business expertise. The main aim of mentoring is to transfer the experience gained to someone less experienced and help the mentee grow in their – sometimes shared – field of expertise.

Coaching, however, is role-specific and skills-focused. Except in the case of in-house coaching, the coach does not need to have direct experience of the client's role or sector. They help their clients progress from objective A to B, even if they aren't experts in the coachee's sector.

Performance and development

Another way to think about the difference is to remember that coaching is performance-driven and mentoring is development-driven.

The aim of coaching in a business is to improve on the performance of an individual or team for the ultimate benefit of the organization. Usually it aims to address a skill or behavioral shortfall or a dip in performance or capability. The duration of the coaching is usually just to address this specific identified behavior.

The aim of mentoring, conversely, is to develop and support the mentee in their current job and equip them for the future. The mentor should not be the mentee's line manager, in order to reduce the risk of conflict.

Mentors and especially coaches need to guard against blurring their roles. For example, over the duration of the coaching relationship, coaches may become directive instead of facilitative. Being facilitative is hard. It requires a constant focus on asking the right questions in the best way to allow the client to look inwards and improve their self-awareness. This then leads to identifying objectives and setting goals to improve upon their behavioral performance. As a leader, you must gain permission before you move between coaching and mentoring, to avoid confusing the coachee or mentee.

Coaching and mentoring in action

A social media marketer was at a watershed in his career. He was suffering from self-confidence and about to turn 40 years of age, so he sought the services of a coach. Initially, the agreed coaching objectives were to build self-esteem and replace the negative self-beliefs that had somehow become part of his everyday life.

Through the coaching process, the marketer developed a new outlook on his professional working relationships. He explored new pathways to self-belief. And he built up his confidence in many different ways, such as taking up new hobbies, including cycling and half-marathons, and volunteering for charities.

An early win occurred when the marketer joined Toastmasters, despite admitting an intense fear of public speaking. With the support of the coach, he was within a year elected Treasurer and then Vice President Education of Toastmasters!

In time, the marketer's initial coaching objectives had been reached – and exceeded. So he and the coach mutually agreed to change their relationship to that of mentor and mentee.

The marketer continued to develop. He began to explore more deeply some of the possibilities that had been unearthed during his coaching experience. In fact, he eventually decided to travel worldwide to grow personally and professionally. And his mentor set up internships for him in Saint-Petersburg, Delhi and New York.

In 18 months, his life had changed in almost every aspect. Of course, it hadn't always been easy. But he found his existing friendships deepening and now found it easier to make new friends. On top of that, he was now *doing* things instead of just thinking about them.

BENEFITS OF COACHING AND MENTORING

Coaching and mentoring offer many benefits, both to the individual and to the organization as a whole.

First, they **improve an individual's personal communication skills**. Poor internal communications can cost a company a great deal of money and time. Coaching and mentoring can address this issue and improve personal communication skills. Increased productivity is an added benefit, along with a reduction in internal and external conflict.

Second, they help organizations **identify high-potential individuals**. Through the coaching process, high-potential individuals can be identified for inclusion in future mentoring programs.

Also, coaching and mentoring help **identify skills gaps**. Skills shortfalls within the organization can also be identified initially through coaching and then mentoring.

Fourth, they **improve the overall culture** of a company. A program of coaching in the short-term can be combined with mentoring in the long-term. This can improve the overall culture of a company and demonstrate a clear path to career advancement.

Coaching and mentoring also **create and deepen personal connections**. A unique connection is created between the coach and coachee, or the mentor and mentee within the organization. Personal connections are deepened, feedback is constant, and employee engagement is improved.

Another benefit is that they help to **increase profitability**. Research by Gallup Workplace shows that engaged individuals will deliver 21% higher profitability. A program of coaching and mentoring for employees then becomes a value-added exercise to increase your organization's profitability. A reduction in absenteeism by up to 41% can be linked to employee engagement and improved productivity.

Mentoring and coaching help to **improve working relationships**. Interpersonal and inter-departmental relationships are improved with coaching and mentoring across the entire organization. These channels improve working relationships and speed up accurate reporting and recognition feedback.

And they help to **retain employees**. There is an expectation in the workforce of most organizations that everyone should be able to access corporate coaching and mentoring. This in turn leads to employee retention and the likelihood of personal investment within the company.

Finally, coaching and mentoring help to **attract potential job candidates**. With a formal coaching and mentoring program, your organization is better able to attract potential job candidates.

In short, mentoring works! Some famous people have benefited and continue to benefit from the mentoring process. Christian Dior mentored Yves St. Laurent. Dolly Parton mentored Miley Cyrus. Jay Z mentored Rihanna. Steve Jobs mentored Mark Zuckerberg. And Warren Buffett mentored Bill Gates.

TRAITS OF AN EFFECTIVE COACH OR MENTOR

In the context of coaching or mentoring, a trait is 'a distinguishing quality or characteristic, belonging to a person.' If you can develop a few of the following coaching and mentoring traits, you will become a good coach or mentor. However, if you can attain *all* of the following traits, then you will be an *excellent* coach or mentor!

Key traits

Being organized

This trait shows commitment to the coaching and mentoring process, and to the people who will be your clients. Coaching and mentoring schedules are established and must be adhered to. While it may be 'only an appointment' to the coach or mentor, it can be 60 minutes of essential unloading for the client. Clients stick to their programs because they are committed to the process. You should be committed too!

Being willing to share your skills and expertise

You need to be self-aware and in the right frame of mind to be a coach or mentor. And you must be willing to share your skills and expertise. If you want to use coaching and mentoring to leverage and control the people you are interacting with, then this is not a process you should involve yourself in.

Adopting a consistent approach

Leave no room for confusion by the client regarding your coaching or mentoring methodology. The client should come to expect four key components from you - and you should deliver them consistently. These are professional standards, ongoing and accurate monitoring, insightful analysis, and honest and accurate feedback.

Displaying a positive attitude

You need to be an open, broad-minded, and balanced person. Display a sincere interest in your client and be willing to help them. You require high emotional intelligence. Remember, what may be a simple issue for you to comprehend may be life-changing for your client.

Being assertive

A great coach or mentor knows when to step away. They are realistic as to the effectiveness - or otherwise - of the coaching or mentoring relationship. The relationship might not work for a number of reasons, such as a clash of personalities, an unrealistic set of expectations, or most commonly resistance to the process. In such cases, you should assertively call a halt. Great coaches and mentors know that it is better to work on those who can grow than on those who won't.

An effective coach or mentor is clear-cut in communicating their expectations, putting the employee on a coaching or mentoring plan and keeping them on task. They use coaching or mentoring

software to keep themselves on track. And they're able to constantly and consistently follow up on agreed actions. If necessary, they're not afraid to dismiss excuses and missed deadlines, and sometimes say that they are 'disappointed' in the inaction of their clients.

Valuing ongoing learning

A great coach or mentor keeps themselves updated on the latest developments and refinements in coaching or mentoring models and approaches.

Providing constructive feedback

Really great coaches and mentors don't just tell their clients what they observed or what went wrong in a one-way monologue. Instead, they ask questions like, "How did that make you feel?" In this way, they allow the client to coach or mentor themselves and carry out some 'out loud' self-analysis. The feedback that the mentor or coach does offer is objective, constructive, and not personal. It is meaningful, relevant, and workable in its application.

Having patience

A good coach or mentor is patient. They are aware that clients will drift off their objectives. The coach or mentor is respected by the client because they display tenacity and doggedness in always keeping the process on track – they never give up.

Motivating others

As a coach or mentor, you need to be able to light a metaphorical fire underneath your coachee or mentee. They need to leave your sessions full of energy, positive attitude, and ready for the next challenge.

Being flexible

A great coach or mentor can adjust themselves mentally and physically to the personality and behavior of their client. For example, they make frequent adjustments to their delivery style when giving feedback. Analytical clients receive technical detail and more structure in their feedback. Driver-type clients receive direct feedback. And affable clients are treated with sensitivity.

Developing the traits

So those are ten key traits of an effective coach or mentor. How can you develop them in your workplace?

First, hold and **maintain the highest regard and respect for the people** that you are coaching or mentoring.

Second, **become an intuitive communicator**. You need to observe and listen to what you are being told – and, more importantly, *not* being told – during the coaching or mentoring process.

Also, **demonstrate your curiosity** in what your client is saying.

Fourth, **be a good listener**. You need to be able to maintain several listening channels at the same time. And be able to retain and recall what you were told previously, while at the same time listening

to the current conversation. You have to be able to answer questions. And you have to be able to think ahead to several possibilities or alternative pathways that this current conversation may lead to.

Fifth, **concentrate**. Being an effective listener for long periods of time during client sessions means you have to pay close attention.

Also, you should aim to **be constantly learning**, developing, and then refining your coaching methodologies.

Seventh, **view coaching and mentoring as being high-trust** and a two-way process between two like-minded people.

Next, **understand that you are a powerful agent for change** in a client's life. Use your power with professionalism, empathy, and respect.

And finally, **model and live your own life as a reflection of what you are suggesting** your clients do with their lives. For example, if you are always talking up getting a good night's sleep, make sure you are also doing so yourself!

COACHING AND MENTORING STRATEGIES

You can use a number of strategies to ensure you coach and mentor employees in an effective manner.

Build a connection

A crucial first step in establishing any coach or mentor relationship is to make the coachee or mentee feel safe and comfortable. This means you need to establish an authentic connection. And remember: first impressions last! So make a determined effort to create a positive connection from the outset.

To help you do this, greet clients warmly and personally with a firm and warm handshake. Introduce yourself and check to make sure the client picked your name up correctly.

Begin with a *human* connection. Make small talk to show that you are not a threat to their safety. Light banter and humility go a very long way to establishing a strong connection. As humility is grounded in vulnerability, this allows the coach or mentor to come across as the 'real' person and open the way for an authentic connection.

Also, maintain a relaxed and open posture. Use your body language to signal interest, concern, and so on. For example, lean in towards the client to indicate interest.

Recognize the client's strengths

Your role as a coach or mentor is to assist your clients in reaching their full potential. As everyone has a set of inherent strengths, whether recognized or not, you must identify, extract, and build upon your client's strengths.

Earn the client's trust

After all, the coaching or mentoring process is a high-trust relationship, whereby both parties need to be open. The coachee or mentee needs to feel confident enough to share their goals and concerns. Building any trusting relationship takes time and patience. A coachee or mentee will probably not open up to you until you have spent some time with them. You have to first 'prove' that you can be trusted with their confidences.

Aim high

And expect your clients to do the same. It is similar to delegation, when you always delegate a task slightly above the ability of a person, to make them strive to be successful. You can build up confidence in the coachee or mentee to reassure them that their course of action is achievable, even though they may encounter pitfalls and roadblocks. The best part about aiming high is that when success is achieved, you are then in a position to celebrate that success with the client. You can use this success for its learning value by pointing out that the client now knows "what success feels like". And they should strive going forward to replicate this feeling as often as possible.

Listen actively

Indeed, this is essential in any coaching or mentoring relationship. Too often, the coach or mentor is impatiently waiting for their turn to talk or thinking about what to say next, instead of truly listening to their client and viewing them, and what they have to say, with interest.

Active listening is a four-step process. First, truly listen to the person and be seen to listen by your body language. Next, feed-back the content and feeling of the person's words. Third, confirm you heard the person correctly. And finally, ask a relevant follow-up question to further clarify your understanding of their situation.

Build rapport

To do this, pay attention to the overall body shape of your client. Roughly copy or emulate it. Then, after a few minutes of conversation, lead your client by shifting your posture and see if they follow your gesture. If they copy you - success! Rapport has now been built and you can intensify the conversation or ask a tough question. If they do not copy your gesture, revert back to their current body stance and try again later.

NOTES

LESSON 3: HOW TO DELEGATE TO YOUR TEAM

GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESSFUL DELEGATION

Why do we have teams anyway?

Have you ever noticed how the team leader or manager is the hardest working person in a team? This isn't surprising. After all, they're responsible for getting the team's work completed. However, this 'busyness' often prevents them from *leading* the team effectively. In fact, instead of being a leader, they become just another individual contributor.

Think about it. A team only exists because all of its work cannot be done by one person. And delegation is essential in any team. At its simplest, delegating is the task of distributing the work among team members. And, very importantly, it also involves supporting the team members to do their tasks successfully.

Guiding principles

When you delegate, keep in mind some guiding principles. First, delegating is easier when people's roles are well-defined. Also, if a team member needs to build competence, delegating can assist them to do so. And third, if the team's work is complex and includes frequent changes in priorities, delegating and tracking tasks and projects becomes more essential.

Instead of just being busy by being busy all the time, an effective manager will focus on delegating as much as possible. They will balance supporting colleagues in doing the delegated work with doing parts of the work that can only be done by the team leader.

Core guidelines

To delegate effectively, leaders should follow these core guidelines.

Be clear about each team member's role and responsibilities

They need to ensure this information is communicated to team members. When delegating, many leaders or managers miss the blindingly obvious value of clearly telling each direct report what they want from them.

Consider this example. A team leader conducted a review with her team about their outputs. The aim was to have team members talk to other teams who depended on what they delivered. The idea was to improve perceptions of their internal services by verifying if what they delivered met expectations. And they would update their processes and procedures if they did not meet expectations. She was also calculating that this strategy could help her overcome some performance issues. She'd have the relevant team members learn from others – their internal 'customers' – rather than from her about what they were not doing well.

Her biggest shock and surprise was hearing the different perceptions of her team members about what they were delivering and why. She had mistakenly assumed that they all knew what was expected of them. After all, they were all subjected to objective-setting and annual performance reviews. What she had also not taken account of was that all of their job descriptions were out of date following a series of organizational changes over the past five years.

She was now uncertain about how best to brief or delegate to her team. She realized that she had never explained to each of them directly what she wanted of them. She tended to deal with many

things herself “because it is quicker and easier.” She was also thinking that the performance issues might have been created by her mistaken assumptions, and by team members’ convictions that what they were doing was right.

Be open to delegating *all of your work*, except what only you can or must do

This will leave them free to support each team member and to stay on top of what the team is accountable for.

Here’s an example. A Regional Manager in charge of local government Adult Care Services had a team of ten managers and team leaders. All of them were busy with heavy workloads. And he was busiest of all, finding it difficult to manage spending time with each of them. He recognized he found it hard to delegate, feeling that he would be overloading already super-busy team members. Several of his colleagues felt he was hard to get to for support, advice, or as a sounding board for their suggestions. They found him sensitive and thoughtful when they did make contact and they liked him as a manager. However, they felt they frequently lost time waiting for his approval or in being uncertain of what he expected.

With his deputy, he took advice and chose to look at the total workload and range of team activities. He then separated out those activities of his own which only he could do. These were defined by actions that required his personal presence or authority, some that required his skill and experience, and other key deliverables. He realized he felt slightly embarrassed at how much of his work did not fit into those categories! His decision was to call a meeting to discuss his discovery and to confess his embarrassment. He also wanted to discuss how he might transition to delegating everything else, especially with his concern to avoid overloading people.

To his surprise, his team colleagues suggested that he should share *more* of his work! This would allow him to be available to support or help when they needed it. In fact, they could work more efficiently and lose less time waiting for his approval. He agreed to meet each one, and discuss what he wanted to delegate and how. His team members agreed the best part was asking them, “What do you need from me to help you make it easy and doable?” He was able to distribute 50% of his workload, leaving him free to supervise and keep ahead of events and it improved everyone’s efficiency.

Make clear how the tasks complement the team

Leaders should help each team member to recognize how the tasks delegated to them complement the whole output of the wider team or organization.

Remember the team leader’s strategy in the first example? Having her staff talk to other teams or stakeholders about the acceptability of the team’s outputs, is one way to achieve this. It is also a powerful way to connect and build synergy with other teams who depend on you.

BUILDING TEAM MEMBERS' CONFIDENCE AND SKILLS

Have you ever considered how delegation can bring benefits to every member of the team? After all, it’s so much more than just distributing work to free up a team leader’s time. It gives leaders the chance to build and develop team members’ confidence, skills, and experience. Each team member can grow as a result. Leaders can facilitate this by giving team members challenging projects that stretch them, while also supporting them in the task. Or they could allow team members to substitute

for the leader at key events, giving them opportunities to lead and so on. This helps to build trust and cooperation, and helps to cement working relationships.

As a team leader, you can use delegation to develop team members' confidence and skills by following some simple guidelines.

Delegate meaningful work

Look for opportunities to delegate *meaningful* work that may be beyond the receiver's current competence. Build-in how to support them if they feel out of their depth. But be careful not to take over!

Consider this example. A Training Manager deputized one of her Training Officers to attend a significant meeting of senior managers. The meeting was called to inform senior managers of the structure and design of a new staff development program, and to solicit their opinions about key elements of the training. The Training Manager informed the senior managers that her deputy was fully briefed and authorized to take decisions. And she also took the very important precaution of asking one of those managers who was sympathetic to "look out for" the Training Officer if any of the others sought to give her a really hard time. Thankfully, that situation didn't arise.

Delegate decision-making

Delegate authority to enable team colleagues to take decisions without having to wait for your approval or signatures.

Here's an example. A manager was criticized by his personal assistant and team members for being absent much of the time. He spent much of his time being an ambassador for the team and its service in an organization of two thousand employees. They were frustrated at having to wait for his signatures on purchase orders and approvals, which caused occasional delays. He accepted their feedback. Most importantly, he expressed his total trust in them, and made arrangements to delegate authority to his personal assistant to sign purchase orders up to a significant amount, and for certain of his team members to take decisions on his behalf. He agreed with them clear guidelines about what should trigger them to consult with him.

Be clear about the task

Tell people specifically what you want them to do. Also, make sure you then check their understanding, and discover what you need to do to support them.

Let me share an example of this guideline in practice. Some years ago, I was coaching a relatively newly appointed team leader. This team leader felt uncertain about how to deal with a team member who was hard-working, capable, but quite a strong character, and who was not behaving like a team member. It was as if he had his own idea about what was to be done, and this did not match with what the team leader needed. I asked if she had told him what she did need from him. "Well," she replied, "he knows what the job is, and everyone knows what our team's objective are!" I persisted and she confessed that she had not *exactly* spelled it out. It seemed too obvious to her. We agreed a way for her to praise his hard work and obvious commitment, and to ask him what his thoughts were about what he should be doing.

Guess what? His response really surprised her! He was convinced that she would be happy with his performance because he was totally dedicated to the team. He had assumed that she was satisfied,

because she had not told him otherwise. When she discussed where his hard work would do the most good for the team, and that she wanted to delegate a key project to him, he became very animated and was keen to cooperate.

DECIDING WHICH TASKS TO DELEGATE

All tasks are not created equal. And not every task is suitable for delegation. So, as a team leader, it's important for you to identify what tasks are suitable for delegation – and which should only be done by the leader.

Of course, there are many good reasons to delegate tasks. Delegation leaves the leader with time to actually *lead* and support the team. It helps to balance the overall workload. It can also provide development opportunities for team members. And it can help to cover unexpected demands.

Delegation guidelines

So which tasks should you, as the team lead, delegate to others? You can follow a number of guidelines to help you decide.

Delegate tasks that you don't have to do

Consider delegating any task that doesn't *have to be* undertaken by you, the leader. Actively identify which aspects of your work *must* be done by you. These would include your actual leadership tasks, such as distributing work, monitoring, supporting, and reporting on performance, ambassadorial tasks representing the team, and dealing with your own manager. Confidential issues are also part of this. So what should you delegate? Well, consider delegating *everything else*!

Delegate tasks you can explain and define clearly

Ensure that tasks you delegate are defined clearly enough so that you can specify exactly what is needed and how it is to be delivered. Exceptions to this may be unclear tasks where the delegation is aimed at clarification. In these cases, specifying how you will know it has been achieved is important. This prevents possible confusion and delays due to delegating tasks that you are unable to explain or define clearly.

Delegate tasks without disrupting the team

Third, delegate tasks that will not disrupt or derail the work of the team and its members. It is not unusual for unexpected or even inappropriate demands to arrive, especially in fast-moving or growing organizations. If delegating all or part of them would threaten to disrupt the team, other means for dealing with them or building them into work plans may be more appropriate.

Delegation in action

There once was a Regional Director who was informed on the morning of a two-day team development retreat that he was going to have to merge his own regional management team with a neighboring one. This task was to be completed in three months. He decided to share that information with his team straight away, and to outline his first thoughts.

He explained that merging two teams each with eleven and twelve members was not feasible. Therefore, in three months' time, some of the people in the room would not be in their current jobs.

He proposed that for some, that change could be of great benefit, and for others it might be an important challenge. His promise was that he would personally discuss details with each person regarding what would be best for both them and the remaining team. His concern was that people would move to better jobs, be re-deployed in other parts of the organization, and that he would ensure they moved with their total dignity and respect intact. He also promised that he would not delegate this task to HR or anyone else. He saw it as his total responsibility!

A couple of years later, I had the opportunity to ask that same Regional Director how, whenever I visited him, his desk was always clear, and he would make time to see me. He responded that he had highly skilled and experienced managers, leaders, and heads of department to run the region from day to day. So everything that arrived at his office had someone's name on it, and was delegated or distributed as soon as possible. He kept for himself his activities as regional representative, and as support person for his team colleagues. Moments after he told me that, one of his senior managers popped his head around the door to say his car had a problem, so his alternative method of long-distance travel to a meeting he was attending on behalf of the director might make him arrive late. The director said, "Here, take my car. I can make my way home this evening without it. You need it more than I do!"

GETTING THE BEST RESULTS

Key principles

How can you ensure you get the best results when you delegate a task? As a team leader, you can follow a number of key principles.

First, **clarify your intention** for delegating work, a task, or a project. And second, **describe the scope** of the work. In other words, specify what is expected and when, and how exactly it will be delivered. However, take care not to specify how to do the work itself. It is the job of the person receiving the instruction to figure that out!

The third principle is to **agree timescales**. You also need to define how you will monitor the work and track progress. And, above all, agree what support and resources will be needed.

Principles in action

Let's look at an example of these principles in action. A team leader in an international United Nations-related organization spent two years developing a high-level financial controls policy, with accompanying Information Technology to drive it. A new Executive Director joined the company and decided he wanted the policy to be radically changed to meet certain criteria that he had in mind.

This was a huge task for this team of one leader and two assistants. Needless to say, the team leader was unsure about whether or how he might delegate the project to the more experienced of his two team mates. His thoughts were, "I know this project inside out – I built it and did all the research. This change will require fresh research, and a major re-working of the software. The only trouble is, it increases my workload so much that I'm feeling overwhelmed by it."

He was concerned that his assistant might not have the skills and experience to do it well enough. He then realized that, for that exact reason, this could be a perfect development opportunity if he delegated it well. It would also avoid his prejudice about changing something he had worked so hard to produce. His assistant could come to it with fresh eyes and re-create it without struggling

emotionally to save existing elements that might slow things down. If he delegated all of it, he would have the space to support and coach his assistant when it might help him.

Checking the scope

So, this is what he did. First, he checked through the scope of the project to ensure he could explain it to his colleague. He realized much of the way it was presented to him reflected *his* knowledge and experience and would need spelling out for his assistant, so he noted those parts.

Framing the project

Second, he ‘framed’ the project for his assistant by telling him his purpose was to offer him a great chance to upgrade his skills and knowledge, pointing out a couple of examples of new things he would learn. He also said he would explain specifically what needed to be delivered at each stage. The project would likely take one year to complete.

Consulting colleagues

The third step was that he asked his colleague directly how he felt about taking on this task and was pleased at the excited response. The project had specific demands that his assistant had been wanting to train in for some time, and it would provide the opportunity.

Discussing deliverables

Fourth, as he discussed what was to be delivered and when, he was determined to be precise. At each step, he asked his assistant to repeat back what he said to check understanding and correct anything mis-heard.

Specifying deliverables

Next, he specified how and in what form he wanted to receive the deliverables. However, he also explained that he was not going to specify how to do the work. He trusted his assistant to use his skill and creativity in how he would go about it. They agreed a system of regular check-ins to track progress. They also agreed that if at any time his assistant discovered any block that might prevent him from meeting a deadline, that he would tell him straight away so they could work together to clear the block and reduce delays.

Supporting colleagues

The sixth, and final, step was that he took care to ask his colleague, “What do you most need from me to help you do this well?” The response was access for advice or information any time he felt stuck. He also asked for complete freedom to explore good ideas without having to ask permission first. The only condition the leader attached to that was a spending limit above which he would need to ask for authorization.

The leader's key challenge was now staying out of the way and letting his team member get on with the task. He made a commitment to himself that if he found himself tempted to get involved because of his emotional ties to his original project, he would remind himself that the reason the Executive Director wanted it changed was because it was no longer fit for purpose.

NOTES

LESSON 4: PROVIDING EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

THE PURPOSE OF FEEDBACK

Test, Operate, Test, Exit

People have always depended on feedback to guide behavior. In 1960, Professor George Miller and his team of researchers at Princeton University in the USA suggested 'Test, Operate, Test, Exit' as a way to describe units of behavior.

How does this apply to feedback? Well, suppose you set a goal for someone. First, the goal is tested to see if it is achieved. If the goal has not been achieved, you need to take action, or operate, to help to achieve the goal. And then you test again.

This cycle of test, operate, and test is continued until the goal is reached. At that point, you can exit. Each test is essentially a measure of how far off the target you are.

Think of it as an aircraft which zig-zags to its destination. It flies in the direction of the destination and gets blown off course by the wind. Each radio beacon on the way allows the navigator to measure how far off course they are and to propose corrective action to the pilot.

This is also the principle of feedback. You test to see whether someone is achieving their goals, and you take action if they're not. If the person's activity, like the aircraft, is 'off course', the feedback is to do with how far off course they are. But if the person is 'on course', the feedback becomes positive, or confirmatory. Positive feedback, especially as praise or celebration, is a powerful motivator. When given skillfully, so-called negative feedback is also motivating.

So the intention of giving feedback is to correct course when team members have gone off course. You want to get them back on track so that they can achieve their goals. Regular feedback should, in time, reduce the amount of 'zig-zagging'. It increases efficiency as team members are better able to gauge their actions and stay on course. Leaders should recognize that feedback is a valuable and necessary part of managing performance.

Principles of effective feedback

Clear goals

How can you ensure that your feedback is effective? Well, first the goals or instructions need to be clearly understood, and often poor feedback is a result of unclear goals in the first place. Effective feedback has two key characteristics. First, to work, feedback needs to be precise enough to indicate how much correction is needed. Feedback can help team members to correct their course, but only if it is specific. When they know how to correct what is not working, they have the best chance of success.

Timely feedback

Second, feedback also needs to be timely enough to minimize drift. Once an aircraft goes off course, the pilot needs to know as soon as possible! Feedback given too late is unlikely to be effective. When you offer feedback as soon as you notice problems, you can reduce delays and costs. And you also help to maintain good working relationships.

Courage

Sometimes, managers or leaders are reluctant to give feedback because they are afraid it will not be well received. However, a crunch point is usually reached when it can't be put off any longer and feedback must be given. And then the team leader is asked the inevitable question: "Why didn't you tell me before!"

Principles in action

You have delegated Instagram updates to one of your team members. However, you notice that the posts contain careless errors, leading to negative comments. You know that the team member is not very receptive to feedback, but you're worried that the mistakes are completely undermining the campaign, so you have to take action. The longer you wait, the worse the problem will become.

After gathering comments about the mistakes, you decide to talk to the team member. First, you praise the team member for the creativity that's evident in the posts. You then point out that careless mistakes are unfortunately distracting target audiences from the creativity.

At first, the team member gets defensive and rejects the criticism. Small mistakes don't matter, he argues. So you show him some of the negative comments on the posts. The team member then points out that he feels under pressure to prepare all the posts each week and doesn't have time to double-check everything. You then both work out a plan to reduce the number of posts he prepares and ask another team member to check each post before it goes live. If you hadn't given this feedback, you wouldn't have known that the schedule was too aggressive for the team member, leading to an inevitable fall in quality.

GIVING FEEDBACK IN ALL DIRECTIONS

Feedback isn't a one-way process

Giving and receiving feedback is essential to regulating workplace relationships and performance. It needs to go in all directions. When offered with positive intentions, it can even be considered like giving a gift. It builds trust and good working relationships, and demonstrates respect for colleagues.

The principles of effective feedback apply in all directions. Offering feedback up, down, and sideways is easier in a culture that recognizes and supports this approach. Unfortunately, many company cultures do not, so tread carefully here, particularly when offering feedback to senior colleagues or peers.

Try to give a reason or frame for offering the feedback. This warns the receiver what is coming, and gives them time to question or refuse the feedback. For example, saying to someone, "I have something I want to feed back to you, and I think you may find it useful. Do you want to hear it?" is a way to frame your feedback. This sets the person up to receive it. And it also acknowledges their right to say no thanks.

In this way, you are asking permission and gaining agreement that feedback would be welcomed before you offer it. This shows respect for your co-workers. And it avoids the consequences of unwanted reactions, especially from more senior colleagues.

Guidelines for offering feedback

There are some guidelines regarding offering feedback that apply in all circumstance, no matter whom you're feeding back to.

Carefully choose when to give the feedback

For example, if the receiver is busy or stressed, that's not going to be a good time to give feedback. Agree a time that suits both you and the receiver. Also, be mindful of when the receiver is most likely to be receptive. For example, is anyone really going to want to listen to feedback late on a Friday afternoon?

Be positive, and specific

It's a good idea to start with some positive feedback where appropriate. And then give specific feedback on what you perceive as being the problem, and what needs to change. Avoid vague complaints. Don't say, "I really don't like your attitude." Instead, point to specific behaviors, such as "I didn't like how you kept interrupting me during the team meeting today."

Approach feedback as a negotiation

Avoid the temptation to impose your own solutions. Ask the other person for suggestions. So, for example, don't say, "You've got to stop interrupting me in meetings." Instead, make it a collaboration. "Perhaps I don't make my points clear enough. How can I make myself clearer in meetings, so you don't have to interrupt me? How can we help each other?"

Avoid judging

Always focus on the behavior, not the person. So again, suppose you're annoyed about someone interrupting you during meetings. Don't just lash out with, "You know, you're a really rude jerk!" Instead, say something like, "Your interruptions make me feel like my contributions aren't important."

Upwards feedback in action

A Training Manager took his team of seven people for a team development retreat in a small country hotel. He explained that he wanted to build a sense of openness and trust, of being able to rely on one another.

Following his introduction to the event, his administrator asked if they could watch a commercial training film called *The Unorganized Manager*. She asked if he had ever seen it. When he told her no, and asked why she wanted them to see it, she replied that the film depicted his way of managing. "The unorganized manager is you!" she offered slightly nervously.

He recovered quickly from the pangs of guilt and disappointment he felt, realizing he had asked for it. He decided that this feedback should be the starting point for that day's event. He thanked his administrator for being honest and courageous enough to give him the feedback. They then began to explore how his behavior was affecting the team.

The team explained that because he was out of the office often for days at a time, authorizations and orders requiring his signature would pile up and cause delays. Being away meant he was also not available to offer support and advice when sometimes it was needed. And because of his personal

working style, he would often agree plans or actions, only to throw them all up in the air the following day saying he had a better idea.

Following the spirit of what he had intended, he asked for the team's ideas about how he might better support their needs and respond to their feedback. Following the discussion, he was able to delegate authority for many of the signatures to his administrator. He agreed to be in the office for at least one hour three days per week at agreed times for supervision. And he agreed that, when they agreed plans or new procedures in team meetings, he would sign them so that, when he proposed to change them for a new idea, his signature was a reminder of what he had agreed, and he would respect that.

WHEN, WHERE, AND HOW TO OFFER FEEDBACK

Giving feedback can be a positive learning experience for all involved. However, it's important for leaders to know when, where, and how best to give feedback. These choices often depend on the context.

When?

When you offer feedback close in time to the event that triggers it, its value is greater. This is particularly the case when you want to improve performance. If you delay performance problems could get worse, leading to further delays and costs.

However, there can also be good reasons to delay giving feedback. Sometime, mistakes happen late in the life cycle of a project. Many projects have a 'lessons learned' process at the end where feedback will have maximum effect.

Also, choose a time when you have the attention of the person receiving the feedback. This ensures that the feedback is heard and acted upon. For example, suppose that you learn that one of your salespeople is being rude to customers on the phone. You know that you need to address this problem as quickly as possible, to ensure you don't start losing customers. So you set a time to meet privately with the salesperson and give the feedback. You don't want the salesperson to be distracted by his phone, so you chose a time when he's not committed to handling calls.

Where?

This may depend on the context that triggers it – for example, following a presentation, or a meeting in which something untoward happens.

With remote working, where colleagues are located elsewhere, face-to-face feedback may be restricted to conference or video calls. This can bring its own challenges because the communication isn't as personal. And technical problems can get in the way of a focused conversation.

Suppose two of your team members get into a heated discussion during a team meeting. This derails the meeting, and other team members feel their time is wasted listening to what they regard as a petty argument. When the meeting is over, you ask the two team members to stay behind in the meeting room. You want to give them immediate feedback, but you don't want to do so in front of other team members. If this deteriorates into another tedious argument between the two, you should meet with each of them privately in your office.

How?

You have a number of choices: spoken, written, alone, or with others present.

Widely dispersed teams, remote working, and long-distance travel will frequently dictate the means of giving feedback. Good intentions can be literally lost in translation between speakers of different native languages and cultures. But also be mindful of the unintended consequences of text or email messages, where people might misread the tone of the communication.

Suppose you've asked members of your team to give short presentations updating other team members about their progress in the project. However, some team members deliver rambling, long, unfocussed presentations, leading to frustration among other team members. You know you're going to have to follow up directly with some team members. However, you think that everyone on the team could benefit from a reminder on how to structure snappy update presentations for the team. So you email the entire team with guidelines on how to present updates and ask everyone to ensure the guidelines are implemented in their next presentations. If some presentations haven't improved by your next meeting, you can deliver individual feedback next time round.

PROVIDING POSITIVE FEEDBACK

Feedback as reinforcement

Feedback is feedback. Terms such as 'positive' or 'negative' are more judgments about how it *feels* to give or receive feedback than the nature of the feedback itself.

Positive feedback may be more usefully thought of as reinforcement or confirmation of expectations being met. This is why it's also known as confirmatory feedback. Telling someone you acknowledge they are on course or exceeding expectations may be highly motivating for them.

Best practices

Follow these best practices when delivering positive feedback.

Be specific

Just as with corrective feedback, your positive feedback needs to be precise. This enables the receiver to identify what they are being praised for. Tell them specifically how the job they did was great.

Keep it factual

Did you know that some people are uncomfortable with being praised? Some people especially dislike vague or general positive feedback, as they may feel that it's insincere or just 'token' feedback. So it's a good idea to keep it factual and practical. For example, you could say, "I think you are doing a good job. Would you like me to specify how so that you can keep doing it?"

Make it public

Ensure everyone knows about the person's achievements or good work. One team member's success can help to raise the morale of other team members. Communicate it to all staff via email

and use team meetings to shine a light on it. Do ensure that the receiver is comfortable with this sort of public feedback, however.

Positive feedback in action

An enterprising young manager, just a few months into the job, came up with a method for improving workflow. This new method delighted his boss, and helped his team mates by reducing their workload. His boss said to him, “Thank you for doing such a great job. I think your team mates might be impressed by how you achieved it. Are you OK if I offer you some feedback in front of the team when we are all together?”

PROVIDING NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

Feedback relating to restoring discipline, correcting mistakes, or preventing unacceptable behavior is commonly referred to as negative feedback. If skillfully delivered, it can be received positively and reinforce desired behavior and performance. To increase receptivity to your feedback, remove judgment, use clear descriptions, and where possible, start with questions.

Best practices

There are best practices you can follow when delivering negative feedback.

Give feedback in the manner of a neutral outside observer

This can help avoid negative reactions by taking the emotion out of the situation. To do this, take up a position beside the receiver of the feedback. Then say you would like them to imagine re-living the incident or event that led to this feedback. Suggest they imagine you are both watching it on video, and ask them to refer to themselves in the scene as 'him or her over there'.

Invite feedback and possible solutions

Ask them if what happened was what they intended. If they had a chance to be there again, what could he or she do differently? This way of talking avoids any sense of confrontation, because the conversation is about him or her over there. It's a dissociated point of view. And inviting self-feedback and possible solutions from the receiver in this way can increase agreement and buy-in. It may also increase respect and remove any need for disciplinary action. If you avoid making judgments or offering your opinions, you leave the person free to create solutions that seem doable for them.

Frame the feedback

Frame any suggestions you make with the words "What if?". Gain their agreement first by saying, “I have some thoughts too about what I would like from you. Can I tell you what they are?” Then say, “What would it be like if you did this from now on? What if you did that, what do you think would happen then?” This way of talking invites the receiver to imagine possible outcomes and either accept, reject, or modify the suggestion. Whatever they propose in response is their idea, and their commitment to it will be greater than if it felt like your idea.

Giving negative feedback in practice

A computer programmer, named Gerry, was being interviewed by his team manager for verbally attacking and shouting at a team colleague and almost coming to blows with him. The fight in an open plan office in front of 20 other employees had been stopped by a third person, and the programmer had been named as the person who started the fight.

The manager started by saying this was a serious incident and really must not happen again. He had arranged their chairs at right angles, side by side. He said, “Gerry, how about if we could see Gerry there by the wall, as if someone had filmed that fight on their mobile phone.”

The manager asked the programmer to talk about “the Gerry over there”. As they ‘watched’ the scene again, the programmer admitted that ‘Gerry’ probably over-reacted. He can see that his colleague was just having a bit of fun teasing him, and things got out of hand.

Gerry argued that his colleague had “gone too far”, and the manager agreed with him. So the manager asked Gerry how he would react the next time his colleague started teasing him.

Gerry promised that he’d keep his cool the next time. He could either ignore the teasing, or talk calmly to the colleague about it.

The manager then asked Gerry if he’d like to hear his suggestion. Once Gerry agreed, the manager asked, “What would it be like if Gerry were to give feedback to his colleague?” just like the manager was giving to Gerry.

Gerry agreed that this would indeed be a good idea!

NOTES

